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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a description of the four stages of the consultation process, an examination of the interviewing behaviors used by the consultant to achieve his goals, and a discussion of the purpose of consultation. The four stages of consultation include problem identification, problem analysis, intervention, and evaluation. The interviewing behaviors used may be classified as: (1) structuring, (2) defining, (3) summarizing, (4) informative, (5) interpretive, (6) validating, or (7) reinforcing. The discussion of the purpose of consultation focuses on the fact that although the aim of consultation is to change child behavior, consultation very likely leads to alternations in change agent and psychologist behavior as well. (SDH)

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THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

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The consultation process is conceived in four stages: problem identification, problem analysis, intervention, and evaluation.

Problem Identification. Problem identification has two purposes: to obtain a definition of the problem in behavioral terms, and to establish recording procedures for measuring the incidence of the problem behavior. The purposes are accomplished in an interview between the psychologist and the change agent.

Problem Analysis. The purposes of problem analysis are: to identify those variables which might be controlling behavior chosen for modification, to define the criterion strength level for goal behaviors and to establish a plan to enable the child to achieve goal behaviors. Problem analysis also requires an interview between the psychologist and the change agent.

Intervention. The purposes of intervention are to implement the modification plan and to measure child behavior during modification.

Evaluation. In the evaluation interview, data collected prior to and during intervention are assessed to determine whether or not intervention has been effective. If the goal established in problem analysis has been achieved, services may terminate. Sometimes, however, the change agent may identify other behaviors for modification. In such cases, the interview shifts from evaluation to problem identification. If the goal has not been attained, further problem analysis is undertaken and a new intervention plan devised.

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Interviewing Behaviors

The psychologist achieves his goals in consultation through the use of several different types of interviewing behaviors. For example, the organization of an interview is established through the use of structuring behaviors.

Structuring Behaviors. Structuring behaviors are statements or questions which specify in broad terms the topics to be discussed in a given phase of an interview. Structuring behaviors are always used to initiate an interview. For example, the psychologist might begin the problem identification interview by saying:

"Tell me about Jimmie."

In the problem analysis interview a structuring behavior introduces discussion of baseline data.

"Let's look at the data you collected last week."

Structuring behaviors are also used to change topics in an interview. Toward the end of the problem identification interview the psychologist typically would want to discuss behavior recording.

"We may need to make some plans to get some concrete data on Jimmie's behavior."

A third use of the structuring behavior is to re-establish focus. When irrelevant material is introduced by the change agent, the psychologist may return the conversation to its previous focus by ignoring the irrelevant material and countering with a structuring behavior.

Defining Behaviors. In specifying target behaviors, goal behaviors, and recording and intervention plans, the psychologist uses defining behaviors. Defining behaviors are statements calling for descriptions of behaviors, or the conditions under which behaviors occur, or the strength of the behaviors. The list that follows specifies types and examples of defining behaviors:

1. Behavior Exemplar Elicitors. A target exemplar elicitor requests the change agent to detail instances of a target class.
"What does Jimmie do when he disrupts the class?"
2. Target Behavior Elicitors. A target behavior elicitor requests the change agent to specify the behavior to be recorded.
"On which of these behaviors would you like to take data?"
3. Goal Behavior Elicitors. Goal behavior elicitors direct the change agent to specify instances of the goal class.
"What kinds of things would Susan need to do to show that she was participating in committee activities?"
4. Strength Elicitors. Strength elicitors direct the change agent to specify quantitative characteristics (e.g., amplitude, latency, frequency) of behavior.
"Approximately how often does this occur?"
5. Conditions Elicitors. Conditions elicitors require the change agent to specify the conditions under which a behavior either should or does occur. There are three types of conditions elicitors.
 - a. Antecedent Conditions Elicitors. Antecedent condition elicitors are requests for information about events prior to a target or goal behavior.
"What generally happens before Susan destroys the work of another child?"
 - b. Consequent Condition Elicitors. Consequent condition elicitors request the change agent to specify events following a target or goal behavior.
"What generally happens after Charles hits another child?"
 - c. Situational Conditions Elicitors. Situational conditions elicitors are requests for specification of the settings in which specific behaviors occur.
"When does Susan's crying typically occur?"

Summarizing Behaviors. Summarizing behaviors are statements which recount the content of a previous interview or phase of an interview. Summarizing behaviors may help the psychologist and the change agent to remember what has been said.

"You've said that Mary hits others, kicks the chairs, and throws crayons on the floor."

Summarizing behaviors also assist in validating the extent to which the psychologist and the change agent agree on what has been communicated. Finally, summarizing behaviors may serve as a catalyst in initiating interpretations of behavior. The psychologist, by mentioning two events which he hypothesizes are related, may plant the seeds for consideration of the relationship by the change agent.

Informative Behaviors. Informative behaviors are statements which convey factual information to the change agent. Informative behaviors can be used to make the change agent aware of recording procedures, results of an informal assessment of a child's skills, or the results of a classroom observation.

"I noticed that when Susan tried to talk to other children, Charles interrupted her."

Interpretive Behaviors. During the problem analysis phase of consultation, the psychologist may wish to infer functional relationships with respect to a behavior and the events surrounding it or he may wish to make inferences about skills underlying effective task accomplishment. To accomplish such purposes the psychologist would use interpretive behaviors. Interpretive behaviors typically are used following a summarizing behavior enumerating the variables which are crucial to whatever inference is to be made.

"It may be that Jimmie is hitting the other children to get your attention."

Validating Behaviors. Validating behaviors are statements designed to determine whether or not the change agent and psychologist agree on some specific point.

Validating behaviors are used to obtain agreement as to problem definition. At the end of the problem definition phase of the problem identification interview, the psychologist should make a summarizing statement defining the problem in terms of target exemplars, conditions, and strength. He should then make a validating statement such as:

"This, then, is the problem. Is that right?"

Validating behaviors are also used to obtain agreement with respect to recording procedures, the modification plan, and the effects of the intervention procedures.

Reinforcers. Verbal reinforcers are occasionally used in consultation. The central use of reinforcement in the consultation process is to maintain verbal behavior on the part of the change agent. For example, the psychologist might say: "Hm-mm" periodically to maintain talking on the part of the teacher.

The Purpose of Consultation

The aim of consultation is to change child behavior. However, consultation very likely eventuates in alterations in change agent and psychologist behavior as well as child behavior. Implicit in any intervention program is the fact that the change agent implementing the program will do something different from what he has been doing. Furthermore, if the intervention is successful, the change agent will be rewarded for altering his own behavior. Consultation may be thought of as a kind of teacher/parent training program in that it eventuates in rewarded alternations of the behaviors of these change agents.

Consultation may produce alterations in psychologist behavior as well as change agent behavior. The consultant receives a great deal of input from change agents which may affect his thinking concerning educational problems. Furthermore, he receives feedback as to the effectiveness of intervention programs designed in consultation which may alter his thinking about such programs.